Spiritual Principles (1)

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1. A few comments on the spiritual principles of the Bambara (in particular on the dya and the nyama) have been collected in the chapter entitled "Théorie des âmes" by Tauxier, La Religion bambara (pp. 14-25), in which the author appraises the works of the Abbé Henry and of Ch. Monteil. Some of the observations made in the following chapter have been summarized by the author in "La Personne chez les Bambara" and in "Note sur le tere chez les Bambara /Note on the Tere among the Bambara/."

It will be useful to compare this study of spiritual principles with the studies made among the Dogon and presented respectively by M. Griaule, S. de Ganay, and the author in Masques Dogon, Les Devises des Dogon, and Les Âmes des Dogon.

761 776 The Soul, ni, and the Double, dya:

[826] Faro controls the principle of life in water, which is his realm as well as the life-giving element par excellence. In the bodies of living beings, this principle has its seat in the blood. The blood of the sacrifices offered to the spirit (or failing that, the juice of the tomato, a transformation of blood) is a contribution to the reservoir of life controlled by Faro—life which he redistributes in all its forms throughout the universe. Water is the privileged element in which life may persevere indefinitely. Elsewhere, life is maintained only if water comes to nourish it.

761 776 842 833 Faro's creative function is materialized by each marital partner eating a tomato before sexual relations. This act is accompanied by the recital of a prayer. The juice of the fruit, which contains the body of the future child, transmits life according to the following mechanism:

761 776 842 824 Faro receives the offerings of tomatoes grown ritually in the consecrated fields, as well as the blood of victims slain in his name above the waters. Blood and juice, spreading over water, the fertilizing agent, are collected by the swallow, Faro's airborne messenger. Liberated in space, they return to the soil with fertilizing rain and penetrate the tomato seeds which thus contain a particle of generative power.

845 Up to the time they are twelve, the children bathe themselves preferably in the Niger. They supposedly can walk on water and never run the risk of drowning.

The twins do not become separated from each other any more than the dya is separated from the living being to which it is attached. They wear the same clothes and eat the same food simultaneously. Formerly male twins married the same woman. If one of them dies 845 at an early age, the blacksmith carves a small wooden doll called 778 flanitokele, which takes the name of the deceased and which the mother puts on the mat next to the living child. The latter takes this doll with him at the time of his circumcision and keeps it during the period of his seclusion in order to bring it back to the parental home whence it is never removed. When he marries, he sticks the doll into the earth along with another piece of wood symbolizing the wife of the deceased. Since twins are in a sense a living replica of Faro, none can bother them without showing disrespect to him. On the other hand, they are the object of attention and precaution on the part of their family as well as their neighbors. Their presence is always beneficial. Considered invulnerable, twins used to march ahead of [728] troups in times of war and would serve as inviolable intermediaries between the warring parties during truce.

The Hermaphrodite

826 The hermaphrodite, being both male and female, is to all extent and purpose his own twin. Consequently, he has no dya (1).

[825 304] 1. The hyena is considered a hermaphrodite; it can engender or conceive, depending on its size and strength, "the stronger impregnating the weaker." A tattooing system is based upon this belief.

/88/ The Albino

[143] Albinos of light or reddish skin and red hair are called gombele or yepege, this latter term being reserved for those who show the most accentuated characteristics.

826 The albino is supposedly born of sexual relations which took place 833 in the middle of the day when the sun is in the koblenkaba, sky of

826 Faro's wrath—a fact which constitutes a serious breaking of taboo.
[333] The consequence of this is to coalesce in the maternal womb the twins originally granted to the woman by Faro and to decolorize the skin of the being thus formed. Because of this fact, the albino, the embodiment of twins, does not inherit the spiritual princples of a deceased person and is also a new being given to men by Faro. But the impurity he has acquired increases tenfold his tere and his wanzo,
[304] which are so active that the circumciser must sacrifice on his own personal altars before performing the operation. From the ambivalence of the albino, originally of the same essence as Faro but fallen because of the impurity transmitted by his parents, stem various customs and representations. (1).

1. This ambivalence is also at the root of the belief that the albino is a being formerly provided with wings and able to fly (see p. 68, a quality he lost after his contact with the impure soil.

826 His body is believed to be endowed with special powers. The per-
778 son who owns his skull will have a numerous family and prosperity; his hair brings wealth; the marrow of his bones provides gold and copper. If he is made to sit at a place where bones are buried, whatever one asks for is granted. His excrements, mixed with seed, have the effect of increasing the harvest for the year.

826 Because of the value attributed to the albino he is a choice victim
782 for the sacrifices to Faro. His nyama is such that he can be sacrificed without prayer, the act itself constituting an efficacious invocation. Lacking living albinos, men often tried to appropriate the remains of a buried body.

Chapter 4

SACRIFICE AND THE ALTAR

782 To call upon spiritual forces and to influence them, the Bambara use prayer, offering, and sacrifice. They perform oral and manual

776 778 823 783 the word, is offered as clothing, and the eggs are offered as purification. As for the ashes, it is the ideal pure element since fire has "removed" its tere from the wood; here it represents the man from whom "the bad force acting on his tere has been removed" (1). Whoever murders an

1. See pp. 90 ff.

animal proceeds in the samw way with the animal's hide upon which he throws cowrie shells. In both cases, the spirits absorb the tere and nyama, which add to their own forces and free the culprit.

Collective purifications are carried out on the dangu when sexual taboos regarding cultivated fields and bush are broken. The impurity [833] resulting from copulation performed outdoors is communicated to all the land belonging to the village; the trees in the bush will no longer bear fruit; the harvests will deteriorate. Formerly the two lovers [684] taken by surprise were deprived of their clothing which was burned on the dangu after they had circled the village three times starting at the left. The culprits were then banished. At present, if the plight of the fields suggests that such an act has been committed, all varieties of cultivated seeds are gathered in a basket which is placed at the cross-roads. Then, all the villagers and their domestic animals circle the village three times while sham battles take place between men mounted on horseback. After a sacrifice offered at the dangu, the seeds, thus purified, are sown.

776 778 823 241 Offerings are made to the spirits of the crossroads at the time of sowing to invoke their protection. This ritual is obligatory for whomever sows cotton, since this seed was given to men by these spirits. The farmer places the seeds, sits down facing west, and cries out three times the name of the dangu above the seeds. He leaves three small piles in homage to the spirit along with fibers from the plant, and kills a victim before proceeding to sow his field. When the stalks are up, he cuts some boughs and returns to the place of sacrifice to sweep up the seeds, thus impregnating them with the nyama of the dangu. He then dries them, grinds, sifts, and mixes them with earth picked up on the same spot. In his field, he shouts /141/ the name of the dangu and throws the mixture with all his strength in the direction of the cardinal points, the zenith, and the ground. When the plants are mature he picks the first seven ripe seeds, brings them to the same place, and offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

D. Role of the Institution

794 182 According to Bambara expression, the ndomo is "the mother of the wanzo of the uncircumcised (1)" for its power which resides in the

1. Wanzo ba ye ɛeble

ritual objects /175/ is composed of the wanzo of all adolescents.

The mask and the altars at first keep a part of the wanzo of the members who wear them, manipulate them, or offer them sacrifices. On the other hand, after circumcision, at the moment of the final leap of the newly circumcised over the ritual fire, the wanzo ultimately leaves them to settle itself in the mask of the ndomo. Thus channeled and conserved, these forces add themselves to those of the uncircumcised in the masks which become the repositories of their life.

[775] Moreover, the soul of the uncircumcised and nonexcised who have died prematurely establishes itself in the altars during the funeral rites celebrated by the members.

The mask of the ndomo is thus the receptacle of the wanzo of the circumcised, living and dead; as for the altars, they contain all the souls of the uncircumcised dead. All of this confers upon the ndomo the responsibility for the life of the adolescents and gives it such power that to a certain extent, this society of young people is feared by the adults (2) who have left it.

794 833 782 2. When an adult, especially a member of the Komo society, has disturbed the peace of a member of the ndomo or has wronged the society, the wanzo may cause him to be impotent. In this case, in order to recover his virility, the man must obtain several tens of gray lizards which are sacrificed in his name on the mask and other altars. The animals are then cooked and the man is completely smeared over with the cooked substance which is then placed in the calabash and poured over the altars; the wanzo assigned to the man by the ndomo thus returns to the latter and the man is rid of its evil.

794 to which its creator chooses to reveal the ritual of initiation.
778 The head of a family, just like an isolated individual
438 or the head of a large community, will not fail to acquire, for a monetary consideration, exclusive possession of one of these powerful boli, which becomes his personal protector. Sounsan, the ancestor of the Massa-si, had with him the nyana n-Ka; Biton, the founder of the empire of Ségou, possessed several famous nyana: na n-Golo-ko (1), Nye-n-dinge du (2), and ba Kung-o-

[776]

1. Literally, na-n-Goloko, "the mother concerned with birth" or, freely translated, "the goddess who presides at birth."

2. Nye dinge du, "the deep orbit of the eye."

ba (3). Generally speaking, these private cults cannot spread,

3. Ba-kung-o-ba, "mother of the great bush."

but when their possessor becomes a powerful chief, they migrate rapidly. This is what happened to Biton's cults; his followers took up the worship of his idols.

794 When an individual becomes the acknowledged possessor of a nyana the result is an alliance with this nyana, which in the native language is called furu, the same word as that used for the
● [833] conjugal union of a man and a woman. Indeed, the installation of a renowned nyana in its master's village gives rise to rejoicing [257] similar to that occasioned by a wedding; hence, the following expressions: a ye boli furu, "he is united with a boli"; a ye boh' furu gosi, "he has effected a union with a boli"; a-ta boli konyo kera, "he has celebrated the wedding of his boli." On the day of such festivals, the master of the nyana (nyana-tigi or boli-tigi, surrounded by his acolytes, offers dlo to his guests who have come to greet him and give him presents. At nightfall, when the uninitiated have withdrawn, the clergy and the adepts in a procession take the boli to the "sacred wood" where the first cult ceremony is held, characterized principally by dancing and singing.

797 (Koutiala circle), Mandjakuy (San circle), Ségou, Kolongotomo (Macina subdivision), and at Sikasso (apostolic prefecture). In Guinea there is a Catholic center at Siguiri. In Upper Volta there are centers at Niangoloko (Banfora circle), Ouahigouya, and Bam: Black sisters (Ouahigouya circle). Finally, in the Ivory Coast there is a center at Gorhogo.

Protestant missions are even less numerous; they are generally American. The efforts they have exerted are far from having been crowned with success. We will mention, however, the cultural centers at Bamako with two protestant schools, the center at Sirakoro (Yanfolila circle), the ones at Baramba and Somasso (Koutiala circle), comprising two missions, the center at N'Torosso (San circle), and that of Sikasso. In Upper Volta, centers are at Siniena (Banfora circle) and at Ouahigouya. Finally, in the Ivory Coast there is one at Torogo (Korhogo circle).

II. Techniques

182 It is impossible to give a complete picture of all Bambara techniques; we are far from knowing them all. Investigations are being carried out on the spot, and already they indicate that no object, in its form or its material, no gesture of the customary actions, is due to the imagination of the maker. On the contrary, the material, [88] as well as the movements, is integrated in a system of representations that the Bambara can explain. The principal techniques among these have been analyzed and explained, but many have been described in a very superficial manner.

A. Body Techniques

776 The Bambara think that fecundation is the work of Faro. This creative function is represented materially by the eating of a tomato 833 by each spouse before sexual relations, which must be repeated twice. 842 It is by means of this consecrated tomato that Faro transmits the life he conserves in water. The role of the father is to give the new-born his articulations which make him fit for work. He transforms the celestial seed into terrestial seed.

844 Before delivery of her child, a woman is advised to pound grain. When the labor pains come, the woman retires to her hut with several matrons (men are not allowed access). If the child is poorly presented, the priest is called. He performs outside the hut, simulating the delivery and chanting the formulas that ease labor. To deliver the infant, the woman kneels with her hands thrown behind her, while the midwife supports the small of her back. At birth the infant's shoulders must touch the ground; this is the moment when he receives his spiritual principles. The infant is washed several times and smeared with karite butter.

846 The mother must not go out during the first eight days after the
853 birth; she must devote herself entirely to the new-born. She massages
854 his head daily in order to give it a more rounded form, and she pinches his nose. She nurses the infant for the first two years, then the weaned child passes directly to the communal calabash. Until the child can walk, the mother carries it astraddle on her back with the aid of a loincloth knotted at her chest. In this manner the infant accompanies the mother everywhere, to work as well as to the dance.
868 It is during these intimate contacts that the mother teaches her child to talk. Later, the little girls stay with their mothers who teach them all the domestic arts, while the boys are educated in outside work.
[867] During their childhook they are taught the usages and rules of deport-
201 ment: a woman knows she must never shake the hand of a man to
576 greet him, and, if he extends his hand, she flings up her arm "as a sign of not being interested." A man will salute his superior by extending his hand palm upwards, and the superior will put his over it; inversely, when a man greets an inferior he extends his hand with the palm down, while for an equal his hand will be perpendicular to the ground. If a man must ask someone's pardon, he puts his hands behind his back to simulate the tail of an animal (for he has acted like an animal). Crossing the hands in front of or upon the head is a sign of sadness. To mark his submission to a king, a man puts his right elbow to the ground. To pray to God, the two hands are extended with the palms turned [89] outward. A woman learns that it is im-
576 pudent to question her husband during the day, and when she speaks
593 of him, she says koke, that is, big brother, for she cannot pronounce
833 his name or in any way recall the bonds which exist between them. It is only during the two consecutive nights that she couples with him

576 that she may speak to him freely. When the day of union comes, the
593 wife herself prepares her husband's food; then she lies on the left side
833 (the feminine side) and her husband on the right side, and she cannot
842 be impregnated except by a union twice repeated.

771 These corporal techniques are dictated and ordered by the religious imperatives which pervade the life of the Bambara from before his birth until after his death.

761 What we have said of the Bambara's religion and of his conception of the world enables us to understand that there cannot be for him a complete break between life and death: birth is a reincarnation; death is not destruction. This is why a man's life does not present one substantial unity but is divided into a certain number of distinct periods, each of which is inaugurated by a rite of transition that marks the death of an anterior state and the rebirth to a new life.

a. Before Birth

843 From the first month after his conception, the infant consti-
761 tutes a person who receives a series of spiritual forces emanating
858 from his father's side of the family and especially from the recently deceased ancestor whose name he will receive. At the same time, he inherits all of the paternal taboos, which the mother must respect during her pregnancy. It is only after his birth, at the time he receives his name, that the infant receives the spiritual forces coming from his mother's side. These forces are transmitted through the medium of the priest and the ancestors of the priest.

761 From then on, the infant is required to observe all the taboos
858 of the beings who have had a part in the composition of his personality; he thus finds himself tightly bound to the society in which he will live.

b. Birth Rites

852 At birth the baby is washed with millet beer (1) (to purify him)

1. For all these rites, see G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

[i.e., sexual reproduction & childrearing; see pp. 117-119. -Analyst]

856
the blacksmith. The doll is given the name of the dead infant, the
304 child carries it with him to the circumcision, and, when he marries,
589 he buries the doll with a piece of wood representing the wife of the deceased.

845 Twins are replicas of Faro, their presence is beneficial, and they are considered invulnerable.

The albino is supposed to be the issue of sexual relations held
826 in sunlight, a breach of taboo. He, too, is a new being. His wanzo
833 is so active that the circumciser must take great precautions before
904 operating on it.

826 He is considered to be endowed with special powers which
782 make him a choice victim for the sacrifices offered to the spirit of the water.

To the children of blacksmiths, the name is given near the
553 paternal forge in the presence of all the artisans. An old man pre-
326 pares seven little sticks, giving each the name of an ancestor. Three of these are drawn at random from the group, and the third gives the name of the baby. The head of the baby is rubbed with the axe Kongobwona, and his shaved hair is soaked in sacrificial blood.

In the Bamako region two chickens or a sheep are sacrificed
553 to celebrate the name-giving. The distribution of the meat is made
782 according to established custom. If it is a chicken, the patriarch receives the head and the gizzard, while the wing and white meat go to the old woman who washed the baby during the first eight days. If it is a sheep, the patriarch receives [91] the ribs (because they are a bulwark, and the patriarch is the defender of the village) and the heart; the blacksmith receives the shoulder; the infant's family gets the head (so that the infant will go ahead), the back (symbol of prosperity), and the limbs (supports one wishes the new-born to have); the blood which runs on the ground is destined for the infant's protective ancestors. Then the family divides the raw meat with the heads of family, and the old woman thus receives her part indirectly.

c. Circumcision

881 A male infant is born, but he still keeps (because of the
304 primordial twinship) the prepuce as the physical support of the female
831 sex. He will only be freed of this by circumcision. It is this operation that definitively determines his sexual qualification and renders him fit to contract marriage.

1 [i.e., the surviving child of twins. -Analyst]

837 Such statements simply mean that there is cheating (1) on both

[833 836]

1. Onanism is very common. Married men tell you openly: "We cannot have too many children, our wives have to go to the markets, and a pregnant woman cannot do this; an b'an dabali ("we manage to avoid having children"). There are few unmarried mothers, and yet the marriage of a virgin is unusual. They have little recourse to abortion, so there is onanism on their part. "Ka bogotigi soro min te djakouma koun don i na yala, to find a young girl who has not fornicated, you will take a walk." It is true that their lovers are often children, who cannot make them mothers.

sides, for all precautions are taken to see that the /165/ mother's breasts do not dry up to avoid the possibility of her conceiving. The soungourou, the widows and divorcées, "real cradle vultures," know how much these precautions weary a young husband, and they come running in large numbers, without shame or modesty.

And while the husband absents himself from his wife for fuller enjoyment, she on her part proves easy with the men friends who visit her or whom she visits, friends who give her the desired enjoyment without ever compromising her. I would go so far as to say that [847] she is glad to find herself deserted, for she might conceive with her husband and then it would be difficult to resort to abortion, while with her friends there is greater freedom.

847 And if she conceives, a pretext is quickly found for her to go to her mother or whoever takes her place. Three fourths of the old women are past masters in abortions. Camphor in large doses is the basis of their brews, and they know how to use gold chloride for a modest fee; they know how to serve each and every one and safeguard their honor.

847 And is abortion such a great crime in the eyes of the Bambara? Less serious, surely, than one might imagine. It is very common, and when a woman passes, one may overhear from the lips of the Negroes, even those of children: "a y'i kono tigné, she has destroyed the fruit of her womb." There is nothing to teach Bambara children; [864] at eight and ten years they know everything! When one listens to their conversations and lends an ear to their songs, they always revolve around the vilest subjects.

3. The Birth of a Child

842 Before birth. -- Not only is it impossible for the Bambara to accept the idea that a man could live without a wife or a woman without a husband, they likewise cannot conceive of a home without children. They desire the pleasures of fatherhood, and a couple who are healthy or, to put it better, capable of consummating the conjugal act, /166/ quickly appeal to a diviner's knowledge, however short a time they have waited to have children. They believe that sterility is the result of sorcery or an evil spell.

●833 When the husband is impotent or afflicted with an illness 847 which prevents all marital relations, his wife readily becomes unfaithful and commits adultery in order to avoid the shame of sterility. Moreover, in order not to have to face a winking eye that speaks volumes or a disdainful smile which reveals everything, the husband is indulgent and even approves her crime, at least for the first times. Let us admit quickly that he can do nothing about it, for if she cannot be unfaithful, the wife will abandon herself to loud cries, demand a divorce, and reject the man, who would himself leave her if she were in a similar situation. Without approving of such indulgence, one can understand it on the part of an unfortunate who needs to keep his cook and safeguard his honor before a people that scorns an impotent man and sees nothing amiss in adultery since it is a crime that can be redeemed.

[164] 843 If a woman who conceives is in a syphilitic condition, which is often the case, the fruit of her womb seldom comes to full term